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FM REO BASRAH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0348

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000081

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/21/2016

TAGS: PREL PTER PGOV KCRM I2

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PICTURE IN BASRAH - NOT PRETTY

REF: (A) BASRAH 55 (B) 05 BASRAH 157

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark F. Marrano, Deputy Regional Coordinator, REO
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 18, Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) hosted separate meetings with Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) member Sayed Ghali (Iraqi National Accord) and Assistant to the Governor, Sayed Rajeh Al Musawi (Independent) at the Regional Embassy Office. The discussions focused on the recent events surrounding the possible ousting of Basrah Governor Mohammed Mussabeh Al Wae'li and his statements concerning the Chief of Police Hassan Al Swaidi and the religious clerics Sheik Muhammad Falak and Sheik Imad Al-Battat. End Summary.

Meeting with Ghali

¶2. (C) Ghali expressed frustration over the paralysis in the BPC and attributed it to the Basrah Islamic Lists being at odds over the removal of the Governor. He stated that the BPC had the necessary 28 votes to remove the Governor, but had not agreed on a possible successor. Similarly, Ghali mentioned that the BPC could not reach agreement regarding who should replace the Chief of Police.

¶3. (C) Ghali urged MNF-I to take action in Basrah, stating that only the Coalition Forces were in a position to restore security. He painted an unflattering picture of the BPC, where politicians were wielding the power of a militia to further their interests (see Ref A). He stated that an assertive effort by Coalition Forces to remove the militia threat had more potential to render the security situation benign than any measure that could be undertaken by the BPC (see ref B for more detail on his personal views).

Meeting with Al Musawi

¶4. (C) In a separate meeting, Rajeh Al Musawi claimed that the delay in ousting the Governor was due to a weak and ineffective Council. He stated, "Yesterday should have been a historic day in Basrah." According to Al Musawi, the BPC missed the opportunity to remove the Governor from office when the issue failed to be presented and discussed at their weekly meeting on Wednesday, May 17. Al Musawi stated that he did not believe that the Council had the 28 votes needed to remove the Governor.

He added that he did not think of Hasan Al Rashid as the ideal candidate for replacement nor did he believe Al Rashid wanted the position. However, Al Musawi stated that if the BPC chose Al Rashid, he would accept the position of Governor.

¶5. (C) Al Musawi categorized Council members as ignorant and controlled by either their political parties or their own personal agendas. Al Musawi recognized the urgent need for the Governor's removal stating that the main issue now is the removal of the Governor in a lawful manner and that having no Governor would be better than continuing under Al Wae'li's regime. Al Musawi's recommended that MNF-I continue to meet with leaders of various political parties and the Chairman of the BPC (when he returns from vacation) and strongly encourage them to vote to remove the Governor. He said that both the Americans and the British needed to motivate the political parties to "make a courageous decision for Basrah." DRC responded by saying that the REO and the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office had met with prominent PC members, encouraging them to bring the issue to final resolution by a vote of the Council. Al Musawi cautioned though that if a vote is taken and not enough votes are received to oust the Governor, the situation would only get worse. He feared that the coming days could be full of hostility and violence in the city.

¶6. (C) Al Musawi repeated the oft-heard refrain about the Governor's ignorance and corruption and stated that Al Wae'li rules Basrah as a dictator and is worse than Saddam. According to Al Musawi, if the Governor remains in power, the situation in Basrah will continue to deteriorate. He told the DRC that Al Wae'li wanted to get rid of the leaders of Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army and run Basrah with his own militia.

The Violence Continues

¶7. (C) In the afternoon of May 18, the REO received reports that there had been an assassination attempt on the life of the Basrah Chief of Police Hasan Al Swaidi. An Improvised Explosive

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Device detonated near his residence at approximately 1030 as his convoy was leaving for the office. According to reports, Hasan Al Swaidi was not hurt in the attack and returned to his residence. DRC and Poloffs heard explosions during the meeting with Sayed Ghali at the time the attack reportedly happened. REO confirmed that the Police Chief was unhurt in the attack.

¶8. (C) Comment: The two meetings confirmed what the REO had been hearing from several different sources; the BPC had failed to take final action against the Governor despite the ground swell that had been building calling for his removal. BPC members are apparently unable to unite and act to remove the Governor because they have their own personal agendas. Both Ghali and Al Musawi appeared very frustrated with the current situation and both repeatedly questioned why the British and Americans were not doing more to help in removing the Governor. Meanwhile, the Governor appears to be able to keep his job, for the near future at least. End Comment.

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